



EMERGENCE OF INDIAN MODERN ART

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ABSTRACT

Modern art emerged quite later in India. Though a remarkable change in Indian art practice was being marked from the period of Bengal School of Art but the modern art movement reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s after India got independence which was very important time in Indian art field to develop art beyond the traditional and folk-art practices. It was really a challenge for Indian degree holder artists to go beyond the age old conventional and traditional notion and mindset and to think internationally. Several major artists' group soon came forward with their progressive manifesto and also gained the international recognition and Indian modern art could earn its own identity in international art world.

KEYWORDS: Art, Artist, Modern, Style, Avant-Garde, Emerge, Expression

INTRODUCTION

Bengal remained the real crucible of modern Indian art since the emergence of revivalist movement of Bengal School of Art against the British academic art practice and Santiniketan's indigenous art practice. Abanindranath (1871-1951), Rabindranath (1861-1941), Gaganendranath (1867-1938), Nandalal (1882-1966), Jamini Roy (1887-1972), Ramkinkar (1906-1970) and Binod Behari (1904-1980) contributed to show the way towards modern Indian art transcending the colonialism's divisive barriers between classical, folk, art and craft. When Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-41) arrived from Paris and visited the Ajanta frescoes she emerged as a modernist with her bold works and her rural vision during very short span of her life. When the beginning of 1940s Rabindranath's and Amrita Sher-Gil's untimely death created a void in Indian art world. The same decade in India witnessed two major events like the World War-II and the catastrophe like great Bengal Famine (1942-43). Although India was not directly involved in World War but the horror of famine shook the very fabrics of Bengal's social and economic life killing at least three million people which left a profound impact on the artists' expression and at this juncture of time painter Zainul Abedin (1914-76) set out to unveil the horror through his rapid famine sketches. Zainul, Chittaprosad (1915-78) and Somanath Hore (1920-2006) afflicted by the horror of famine painted with an expressionist's vision which made the public aware regarding the social responsibility of an artist. During this disturbance and uncertainty, a group of Bengali artists came to form a progressive group 'Calcutta Group' in 1943. Pradosh Dasgupta (1912-91), Paritosh Sen (1918-2008), Nirode Mazumdar (1916-82), Gopal Ghose (1913-80), Rathin Mitra (1926-2019), Subha Tagore, Abani Sen, Pranakrushna Pal and Kamala Dasgupta were the founder members of the group. With the aim to be international they produced an art with contemporary values which had a socio-political role.

When Calcutta, Bombay and Madras had become the centres of art in the curriculum of J.J. School of Art a little bit changes took place and it was after Charles Gerard became the Principal he introduced European Modern techniques in pictorial design which gave a new creative freedom to the students and some of the students like P.T. Reddy, C. Baptista, A.A. Majeed, M.T. Bhople, M.Y. Kulkarni came together in a group show 'Young Turks' in 1941 which brought a new wave in Bombay art scene before the formation of Progressive Artists' Group. The members of 'Young Turks' synthesised the Indian design value with mannerisms of post-impressionism and expressionism. At this time Indian Connoisseurs such as nuclear scientist Homi Jahangir Bhabha (1909-66) and the writer and art historian Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) emerged to patronise the Indian modern art. A few Jewish immigrants who fled to settle in Bombay are remembered for their support to the modernists who emerged as an avant-garde group to represent both cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The pharmaceutical manufacturer and collector Emmanuel Schlesinger helped them by providing a rented house for the Artists' Centre and the artists were provided a space for an informal salon in the home of Walter Langhammer, a painting teacher and artist from Vienna and Rudolf von Leyden, a cartoonist and graphic designer for Times of India helped them by making critical analysis of their works and in the favour of modernism in the newspaper. These artists were formed into a group named Progressive Artists Group existed from 1948 to 1956 what gave momentum to the movement of Indian modern painting. The founder members of the group were Francis Newton Souza, (1924-2002), Sayed Haider Raza (1922-2016), Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011), Krishnaji Howlaji Ara (1914-85), Hari Ambadas Gade (1917-2001), Sadanand Bakre (1920-2007) who grouped against the academic

tradition as well as the romantic and revivalist style of the Bengal School of art. Defining the meaning of modern art they sought the importance of looking back to India's classical, artistic past and to the west for innovations in technique and style. They became conversant with the Postimpressionist styles of painting developed in Germany and France and the group emerged as a socially engaged avant-garde group with both nationalism of own nation and cosmopolitanism. The artists of Bombay worked in divergent way that some including F.N. Souza, Akbar Padamsee (1928-2020), S.H. Raza, and Tyeb Mehta (1925-2009) migrated to London and Paris and some worked within the country. Another important contribution that the publication of 'Marg' magazine in Bombay by Mulk Raj Anand, sponsored by Tata industrial group in 1946 publishing essays and art criticism was a forum for Indian modern art during these days. Before the emergence the centres of modern art in Bombay the Bombay Art Society established in 1888 by the colonial elites. In the decades after independence the Jehangir Art Gallery and an art gallery named Gallery 59 and in 1960s the Pundole Art Gallery and Chemould Art Gallery emerged in Bombay for the exhibition of modern art where artists would meet each other and discuss. Homi Jahangir Bhabha was one of the art collectors who collected a good number of modern Indian paintings and among foreign art collectors Davida and Chester Herwitz were prominent figures who began to collect Indian art in Bombay and Delhi in 1960s.

With the independence of India Delhi emerged as a major centre of modern art. When various Artists' groups were formed an avant-garde artists' group was formed in New Delhi called 'Delhi Silpi Chakra'. With the designing of the new capital in 1954 three national academies for literature, performing art, and one for the fine art and the National Gallery of Modern Art were established by the government of India though there was the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society in New Delhi from 1928. The Lalit Kala Academy's publications like 'Lalit Kala Contemporary' became another forum to discuss the modern art. The government of India also emphasizing on folk and traditional art formed the Handicrafts and Handloom boards for the preservation and development of Indian art and handicrafts which was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation in New York. This foundation played a major role for development of Indian modern art and collected the works of modern painters of India basically of Hussain and Ram Kumar. Indian artists such as G.R. Santosh, Biren De, S.H. Raza, K.C.S. Paniker being fascinated by the geometrical symbols, lines, colours and architectural patterns of 'Tantrism'.

After Bombay and Delhi, Baroda emerged as a major centre of post-colonial Indian art with the establishment of the Fine art faculty of M.S. University in 1950 under the guidance of the faculties like K.G. Subramanyan (1924-2016) and Sankho Choudhuri (1916-2006) and N.S. Bendre (1910-92). In 1957 with the formation of the 'Baroda Group' they became aware of their social concern and K.G. Subramanyan, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh (b.1937), Bhupen Khakar (1934-2003), Ratan Parimoo (b. 1936), Jyotsna Bhatt (1940-2020) and Vivan Sundaram (b. 1943) rejecting the Neo-Tantrism started the figurative narrative style painting. Baroda became the highly influential centre for the next generation of Indian artists. Thus, the artists from Delhi, Bombay and Baroda became the main stream modern Indian artists who became the inspiration for the Indian artists of the new generation.

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